

Article

Bidirectional Transcendence in Confucianism: An Analysis Centered on the Concept of *Jing*

Yongyong Sun *  and Zhenyu Zeng

Advanced Institute for Confucian Studies, Shandong University, Jinan 250100, China; zengzy@sdu.edu.cn

* Correspondence: 202320208@mail.sdu.edu.cn

Abstract

This paper proposes a comparative model of “bidirectional transcendence” in Confucian thought by reading the concept of *jing* (敬) against two kinds of human finitude: “no-more” of being and “not-yet” of being. Drawing on philological analysis of classical lexemes, close readings of Song–Ming Neo-Confucian texts, and a comparison with Western accounts of religious and philosophical transcendence, I show that *jing* generates two complementary responses. The first is an outward, historicizing form of transcendence—embodied in “revering Heaven and following ancestors” (*jingtian fazu* 敬天法祖)—which secures communal meaning and a this-worldly continuity of ethical life in the face of the “no-more.” The second is an inward, realm-oriented transcendence—articulated in “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life” (*jing yi zhi nei* 敬以直内)—realized through self-cultivation (*gongfu* 工夫) and the integration of mind and the principle of Heaven, and oriented toward the “not-yet.” This bidirectional framework reconciles readings that cast Confucianism as either purely ethical or essentially religious, clarifies recurring comparative and translational pitfalls, and offers a concise, textually grounded basis for Sino–Western dialogue about varieties of transcendence and ultimate concern.

Keywords: religious transcendence; philosophical transcendence; *jingtian fazu* (revering Heaven and following ancestors); *jing yi zhi nei* (being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life); finitude

1. Introduction

Scholars have long treated Confucian transcendence as central both to defining Sino–Western cultural differences and to constructing a Confucian self-narrative. The New Confucian school offered the most systematic early account in the formulation of “immanent transcendence” (内在超越), first advanced by Tang (2016a, pp. 308–9) and later developed by Mou Zongsan. Mou argues that “the Way of Heaven (*Tiandao* 天道) resides on high, possessing a transcendent meaning. Yet, as it permeates the human person and becomes indwelling as human nature, it is simultaneously immanent. Drawing on Kant’s preferred terminology, we may say that the Way of Heaven is, on the one hand, transcendent, and on the other hand, immanent (with immanent and transcendent being opposite terms). When the Way of Heaven is both transcendent and immanent, it carries both religious and moral significance: whereas religion emphasizes the transcendent, morality privileges the immanent” (Mou 2010, p. 24).

Here, Mou Zongsan already recognizes that immanent and transcendent are opposed concepts. This point aligns with Merold Westphal’s observation that “the concept of transcendence itself is a spatial metaphor signifying ‘there and not here’, and especially ‘up



Academic Editors: Yuehua Chen,
Chuanhui Zeng, Zhejia Tang and
Xuedan Li

Received: 26 November 2025

Revised: 12 February 2026

Accepted: 13 February 2026

Published: 17 February 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

there and not down here” (Westphal 2017), so describing something as both transcendent and immanent appears contradictory. To address this problem, Schwartz (1975) and Y.-s. Yu (2014, pp. 205–6) recommended recasting the idea as “inward transcendence” rather than as strictly “immanent transcendence.”

Whether labeled “immanent” or “inward,” these moves sought to highlight a distinctive Chinese approach in comparative perspective. Yet focusing exclusively on inwardness risks distorting the picture: it can overlook Western traditions that also articulate inward forms of transcendence and reduce Confucian life to a unidimensional model. To redress this imbalance, some scholars—such as Zhao (2020)—propose a “transcendence of the golden mean” (中道超越), while others, including Liang (2022) and Chang (2023), prefer the term “double transcendence” (雙向超越).

While this body of scholarship has enriched our typological understanding of Confucian transcendence, it nevertheless encounters a fundamental theoretical difficulty. The central problem is that the very concept of “transcendence” originates within a Western intellectual context. Consequently, attempts to classify Confucian forms of transcendence often remain confined to descriptive typologies or mere analogies with Western concepts. Lacking a unified theoretical framework with genuine cross-cultural explanatory power, neither the commonalities nor the fundamental divergences between Chinese and Western theories of transcendence can be articulated with sufficient conceptual clarity. Therefore, what is required is not merely a transfer of terminology, but a rigorous dialogue conducted within a shared frame of reference.

To address these challenges, this paper develops a comparative framework. Drawing on Paul Tillich’s dual account of human finitude—the terminal “no-more of being” and the anticipatory “not-yet of being”—it establishes analytical coordinates to distinguish the transcendence of existential finitude from the transcendence of experiential finitude. Within Western thought, the paper posits religious doctrines of the soul’s immortality and Kantian philosophy as representatives of these respective orientations.

Turning to Confucian thought, the study focuses on the concept of *jing* (敬), analyzing it along two dimensions: “revering Heaven and following ancestors” (*jingtian fazu* 敬天法祖) and “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life” (*jing yi zhi nei* 敬以直内). The paper argues that the former articulates an outward, communal, and historical form of religious transcendence via the construction of ethical order, historical continuity, and cultural meaning. Conversely, the latter develops an inward, realm-oriented philosophical transcendence through self-cultivation (*gongfu* 工夫) and the clarification of the mind. These two dimensions are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing; together, they constitute the distinctive structure of Confucian transcendence. By situating both Chinese and Western traditions within this shared coordinate framework, this paper offers a coherent theoretical perspective for understanding Confucian transcendence, thereby promoting dialogue and intellectual exchange between the two civilizations.

2. Twofold Finitude and Bidirectional Transcendence

“Transcendence” is commonly used in religious contexts to name longing for the sacred, the beyond, the infinite, or the absolute, but it is not exclusively theological. Etymologically, English transcend derives from Latin *transcendere*, whose core root *scando* literally means “I climb.” When that root combines with prepositional elements such as *as-*, *de-*, and *trans-*, the resulting verbal patterns register basic actions of ascending, descending, or crossing over (Shah 2012, pp. 41–42). Structurally, then, “to transcend” is first an action: something climbs out of something else. That verbal architecture already presupposes limits and the possibility of boundary crossing.

Applied to human beings, those limits follow from finitude. Paul Tillich's terse definition captures this well: "Being, limited by nonbeing, is finitude. Nonbeing appears as the 'not yet' of being and as the 'no more' of being. It confronts that which is with a definite end (finis)." (Tillich 1967, p. 189). For Tillich, the human is an empirical mode of existence unfolding in time; this condition means we first encounter, in the "no-more" of being, the finitude of life and the anxiety of facing death. That persistent existential anxiety often gives rise to religious forms of transcendence, which seek to console the present self by positing that the self, though no longer present, nevertheless endures.

Alongside temporal finitude, the "not-yet" reveals the finitude of experience. In the process of manifestation, experience fixes what "I am," yet that givenness remains open: by virtue of the "not-yet," experience also points to the infinite possibilities of what "I will be." From this perspective, Tillich's "not-yet" is not merely an empirical gap but an orientation toward imminent possibilities of being; it makes experiential existence an openness directed at what "is not yet." In this respect, transcendence can appear as an immanent *telos*¹—an inhering tendency of the finite self to address and question Being itself. As Tillich puts it, "Being-itself manifests itself to finite being in the infinite drive of the finite beyond itself." (Tillich 1967, p. 191). It is this orientation toward the "not-yet"—this telos and impulse—that philosophical (rather than merely religious) accounts of transcendence aim to grasp.

Building on this twofold sense of finitude, Cheng Zhihua notes that "transcendence in fact admits of a religious or faith sense and a philosophical or rational sense—that is, transcendence comes in two kinds, 'external transcendence' and 'internal transcendence.'" (Cheng 2023). However, this distinction does not aim to rigidly separate religious and philosophical traditions, as many—Christianity in particular—encompass rich philosophical reflection. Instead, the distinction concerns different modes of transcendence, defined by how human finitude is framed and addressed. Here, the two modes correspond to distinct limits of existence, pointing respectively to the "no-more" of being and the "not-yet" of being. Accordingly, as Huang Yushun argues, "the object or limit that religion transcends is the secular world in which humans dwell," whereas "the object or limit that the philosophical notion of transcendence ... transcends is the sensible, experiential realm of persons within that secular world." (Huang 2021). Although both forms respond to human finitude, they take different routes and rest on distinct constitutive grounds.

Religious transcendence is framed primarily in ontological terms: it explains how the individual overcomes the terminal "no-more" and thus lessens the existential anxiety produced by mortality. At this level, transcendence and immortality address closely related concerns. In the Western religious tradition—especially in Christian theology—this concern typically takes the form of the doctrine of the soul's immortality. The idea traces in part to Orphic mysticism, which holds that "human nature is a combination of a divine soul and a mortal body, and through rituals and spiritual purification, immortality can be achieved." (Mincheva 2024). As Hebraic motifs entered European theological formation and were assimilated into Christian thought, the soul's immortality became integrated into Christian doctrine and, together with eschatology and soteriology, helped constitute Christian ethical meaning. Within that structure, finite life ends within secular time, but hope in final judgment and divine redemption opens the possibility that the soul will be resurrected and granted eternal life; thus, the soul's immortality functions as the theological, eschatologically grounded response to the life-rupture signified by the "no-more."

By contrast, philosophical transcendence proceeds from already-unfolded experience to construct a reasoned imagination of the "not-yet." Kant provides the most sustained account of this move. To make such a projection epistemically defensible, Kant first limits human cognition by distinguishing the transcendental from the transcendent. "Transcen-

dental” names the forms and categories of cognition that are epistemologically prior to experience and make experience possible; “transcendent” names reason’s use of ideas beyond the bounds of possible experience. In transcendental philosophy, ideas are by definition transcendent, but they cannot deliver knowledge of transcendent objects; if theoretical reason exceeds possible experience, it falls into transcendental illusion. Thus Kant confines theoretical reason to sensible intuition and assigns the transcendent use of ideas to practical reason, justifying that use by appeal to the “principle of reality” (the practical postulates). In Kant’s formulation, “transcendental ideas are not directed at objects of knowledge but concern ends that are not cognizable yet are practically postulated.” (Deng 2005). At the same time, Kant concedes—by appeal to the “fact”²—that practical reason itself displays an irrepressible tendency; this concession preserves a portal to the infinite for the moral domain. As Tillich puts it, “The only point at which the prison of finitude is open is the realm of moral experience, because in it something unconditional breaks into the whole of temporal and causal conditions.” (Tillich 1967, p. 82). For Kant, then, when the finite self confronts the “not-yet,” transcendence is not an epistemic overreach of theoretical reason but an extension of practical reason within the moral sphere: grounded in the moral law and driven by the infinite impetus of moral striving, the subject can move beyond empirical limits and thereby open the possibility of self-transformation.

The “not-yet” dimension concerns the incompleteness of present experience and imagination. Philosophers treat this side of finitude as an orienting project of reason: not a metaphysical escape from the world but a regulative pull that structures inquiry, moral striving, and conceptual aspiration. Kant’s critical philosophy is paradigmatic here. He distinguishes the transcendental conditions that make experience possible from the illegitimate speculative use of reason beyond experience, while granting practical reason the right to project regulative ideas (such as freedom, God, and immortality) as moral postulates that orient action. In this register, transcendence is experiential and practical: it functions as a telos that shapes self-transformation rather than as a metaphysical object that theoretical reason can cognize.

Seen together, the two limits of finitude—the “no-more” and the “not-yet”—foster a bifurcation of transcendence into an outward, religious mode and an inward, philosophical mode. William Wainwright’s distinction between “ontological transcendence” and “experiential transcendence” offers an illuminating framework for understanding these two forms. As he explains:

Ontological and experiential transcendence are different but related aspects of the divine mystery. For God is an epistemological and ontological mystery who exceeds our grasp in two ways. Mysteries are epistemological when they are a function of the relation between God’s nature or being on the one hand, and the limitations of created intellects on the other. They are ontological when they are an intrinsic aspect of God’s own being or nature rather than a consequence of the limitations of human or angelic knowledge of it. Both types of mystery elude conceptualization but they do so in very different ways and for very different reasons. Epistemological mysteries elude it in cases where while adequate concepts may be in principle available (if only to God), they are not fully available to finite intellects. Ontological mysteries elude conceptualization because no concepts can fully express it. Symbols, images, songs, and perhaps ultimately the silence of mystical prayer, alone can do so.

(Wainwright 2017)

Here, “ontological transcendence” names an ultimate Being that exceeds every finite mode of existence; it is a claim about how things are, not merely about how we know them. Thus, in the face of the “no-more,” ontological transcendence allows the finite self—for ex-

ample, through poetry or prayer—to petition an infinite Person for a mode of being that lies beyond empirical presence and so to bridge the rupture of natural life. By contrast, “experiential transcendence” refers primarily to the fact that created intellects, constrained by the limits of cognition, are unable to know the fully realized Person, or the thing in itself. When this form of transcendence is understood in Kantian terms, however, it suggests that beyond the limits of finite knowledge the individual may rely on an unrestricted practical reason to pursue an infinite approximation toward moral ends; through this ongoing process, the present moment is extended into a mode of existence oriented toward higher meaning.

Thus, it becomes evident that the two forms of transcendence—ontological and experiential—distinguished according to the differing attributes of God, correspond respectively to the religious and philosophical traditions within Western culture. The former addresses the anxiety of the “no-more” through the redemptive power of a personal deity, while the latter opens, through practical reason, a space of imaginative possibility within the fissures of finite experience toward the “not-yet.”

This distinction, grounded in the structure of finitude and its corresponding transcendental orientation, is not the only way in which the finite self can reflect on transcendence, nor can it function as a universal template for interpreting transcendence across cultural traditions. It does, however, provide a useful point of reference for comparing how different cultures confront the limits of human existence and seek to move beyond them. From this perspective, the Confucian concept of *jing*³ may be analyzed within the finite coordinates of the “no-more” and the “not-yet” along two dimensions: a form of religious transcendence exemplified by “revering Heaven and following ancestors,” and a form of philosophical transcendence expressed in “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life.” Read in this way, Confucian transcendence emerges with greater conceptual clarity and offers a productive basis for dialogue and mutual learning between Chinese and Western civilizations.

3. Revering Heaven and Following Ancestors: Outward Historical Transcendence

In Chinese, characters are essentially pictographic. From this perspective, the character *jing* originally depicted a shaman—kneeling and wearing a horned headdress—performing rites to appease the spirits (X. Yu 1963). The character thus expressed the mix of fear and reverence that people feel toward mysterious divine powers. By the Yin–Zhou period, the focus of divinity had shifted from a concrete god (*di* 帝) to the more abstract notion of Heaven (*tian* 天). The formula “revering Heaven and following ancestors” (敬天法祖) consequently highlights *jing*’s intentional and emotional dimensions within an atmosphere of awe.

Subsequently, the meaning of *jing* shifted from a primarily ritual posture to a more active, reflective, and inward psychological disposition (Xu 2013, pp. 21–22). In this self-aware register, it acquired a practice-oriented sense linked to moral cultivation, expressed in the phrase “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life” (敬以直内). From a psychological perspective, “revering Heaven and following ancestors” and “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life” represent complementary dimensions of the same concept: the former denotes an intentional, reverential affect in a religious context, while the latter describes the sustained, attentive mental orientation emphasized in Neo-Confucian moral self-cultivation.

As an intentional affect directed toward the transcendent, “revering Heaven and following ancestors” represents the Confucian orientation most akin to religious expression. This proximity lies in its address of existential questions comparable to those of Western

theology; to equate it directly with religious transcendence in Western theological terms, however, would be misleading. Instead, it should be understood as a composite formation that emerged within a specific cultural context, integrating religious emotion with ethical norms and political meaning.

In its earliest expressions, “revering Heaven and following ancestors” appears primarily as a religious feeling. At its core are awe, vigilance, and even fear in response to a transcendent power. This is evident in *the She King* (詩經): “Revere the anger of Heaven, And presume not to make sport or be idle.” (敬天之怒，無敢戲豫) (Legge 1960b, p. 503). Similarly, *the Shoo King* (尚書) admonishes: “But now, Shou, the king of Shang, does not reverence Heaven above, and inflicts calamities on the people below.” (今商王受，弗敬上天，降災下民。) (Legge 1865b, p. 284). Such religious emotion essentially expressed an awareness of a cosmic order, which was later codified in *the Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸) as “revering what is honored” (*jing qi suo zun* 敬其所尊). Expanding upon this, “revering what is honored” does not target a solitary transcendent object. Instead, ritual institutions systematically define the objects of honor, transforming reverence from a spontaneous emotional response to the supernatural into the recognition of a pre-existing value order. By channeling these sentiments through ancestral temples, genealogies, and sacrificial rites, the tradition embeds “revering Heaven” (*jingtian* 敬天) and “following ancestors” (*fazu* 法祖) within a ritual system defined by hierarchy (*zunzun* 尊尊) and kinship (*qinqin* 親親). Consequently, “revering Heaven and following ancestors” evolves beyond mere awe into a normative psychological framework that constitutes and sustains the community over time.

In traditional discourse, Heaven functions as the ultimate guarantor for secular ethics and moral judgment. This supreme emblem of transcendence is captured in Confucius’s exclamation in the *Analects*: “It is only Heaven that is grand.” (*wei Tian wei da* 唯天為大) (Legge 1960a, p. 214). By grounding political authority in participation in the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命), historical development is thereby framed as a purposive and teleological process.

The shaping of secular values by the Mandate of Heaven proceeds along two complementary tracks: the ruler’s political alignment with Heaven and the sage’s role in acting on Heaven’s behalf to realize the Way. The opening admonition of the *Analects* chapter Yao Yue cautions the one who occupies the throne: “the Heaven-determined order of succession now rests in your person. Sincerely hold fast the due Mean. If there shall be distress and want within the four seas, the Heavenly revenue will come to a perpetual end.” (天之曆數在爾躬；允執其中；四海困窮，天祿永終) (Legge 1960a, p. 350). As the bearer of this heavenly tally, the ruler must heed the Mandate. In political practice, the Mandate is woven into secular governance and functions as a foundational source of historical value and legitimacy.

Complementing this, the sage realizes the Mandate by “acting for Heaven” in both speech and conduct. When Confucius remarked, “At fifty I knew the decrees of Heaven” (五十而知天命), Liu Baonan (劉寶楠) explained: “‘Heaven’s mandate’—as the *Shuowen Jiezi* defines it—means a command. It signifies that Heaven has destined one to be thus. ... Those who understand Heaven’s mandate know that they are sent by Heaven, not born in vain.” (「天命」者，《說文》雲：「命，使也。」言天使已如此也。.....知天命者，知己為天所命，非虛生也) (Liu 1990, pp. 44–45).⁴ Through the sage’s exemplary comportment and the transmission of canonical teaching, the Mandate of Heaven becomes internalized within the secular community and serves as a recurring source of historical legitimation.

Aside from Heaven, the ancestor likewise functions as a formative cultural symbol shaping collective meaning and historical value; together they stand in a mutually in-

terpretive relation within the religious consciousness expressed as “serving before God (*binyudi* 賓於帝)” and “being aligned with Heaven (*peiyutian* 配於天).” Among the oracle bone inscriptions excavated at Yinxu (殷墟), there are inscriptions containing ritual expressions such as “*Xian binyudi*,” (鹹賓於帝) “*Taijia binyudi*,” (大甲賓於帝) and “*Xiayi binyudi*,” (下乙賓於帝) attested in divinatory contexts (Hu 1999, no. 1402). These inscriptions show that as early as the Shang dynasty, the royal ancestral spirit was regarded as “serving before God”—an intermediary between God and the people—so reverence for Heaven necessarily encompassed ancestral sacrifice. The Zhou continued this practice and, through the ethical imagination of “grateful remembrance of origin and return to the beginning,” made ritual practice more human-centered. As the *Liji* states: “All things originate from Heaven; man originates from his (great) ancestor. This is the reason why Ki was associated with God (at this sacrifice). In the sacrifices at the border, there was an expression of gratitude to the source of their prosperity and a going back in their thoughts to the beginning of (all being).” (萬物本乎天，人本乎祖，此所以配上帝也。郊之祭也，大報本反始也) (Legge 1885, pp. 430–31). On this basis, Confucianism developed a symbolic system of Heaven–human correspondence that maintained a close connection between Heaven and the ancestors. In this context, Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒) writes in the *Chunqiu Fanlu* (春秋繁露): “They perform ancestral rites for the former emperors in the ancestral temple, aligning the ancestors with Heaven.” (宗祀先帝，以祖配天) (Su 1992, p. 104). He even treats Heaven as humanity’s great ancestor. Analyzing this line of thought in Dong Zhongshu, Joshua R. Brown and Alexis McLeod argue that this Heaven–human correlative model of transcendence represents a form of “non-naturalism” and “non-contrastive” transcendence (Brown and McLeod 2021, pp. 85–87).

Within this form of non-naturalism—grounded in the structural correspondence between Heaven and humanity—the transcendence expressed by “revering Heaven and following ancestors” does not primarily rely on belief in an otherworldly, divinely granted personal immortality. Instead, it rests on the cosmological-ethical axiom articulated in the “Treatise on the Appended Remarks” (*Xici* 繫辭) of *The I Ching* (易經): “The great virtue of Heaven and Earth is called life (天之大德曰生)” (Zhu 2020, p. 286), that is, an ethics of generativity (*shengsheng* 生生). In this ethical vision, generativity is an essential feature of the Way of Heaven. The idea of generation here is not simply a natural process, but a transcendent connection with ontological significance. As Song Bin has observed, “If we define transcendence as what is indeterminate and ontologically unconditioned by the existing world, *Taiji*’s ‘sheng sheng’ conceptualized as ‘generatio ex nihilo’ is even more transcendent than the mainstream theistic Christian understanding of divine creation” (Song 2026, p. viii).⁵

In this way, the Confucian idea of “revering Heaven and following ancestors,” by extending from the ethical community to the cultural community, establishes a historically continuous form of humanistic transcendence, within which the ancestor first appears as a marker of ethical identity. Through commemorative rites, an individual’s end-of-life is reinterpreted as continued existence within the bloodline: death becomes a transformation into social and genealogical presence. From this logic, the Confucian practice of “attending carefully to the end and remembering the departed with reverence (*shenzhong zhuiyuan* 慎終追遠)” is not a fanciful appeal to an otherworldly realm, but a ritual praxis that makes those who are “no longer present” present again within intergenerational memory, thereby addressing the life-finitude of the “no-more.” As Sun Xiangchen observes, “within the ontological frame of ‘Endless Growth’ (*shengsheng buxi* 生生不息), recollection of ancestors and the forward-looking hope for countless descendants create an ethos of ‘uplinking to antiquity and downlinking to posterity’ (上通千古下通萬世)—a backward transmission and a forward veneration that grounds the origin and continuity of moral life.” (Sun 2016).

By means of this “ethical immortality,” Confucian culture transforms the ancestor from a clan marker into a shared cultural emblem. Bound together as “descendants of the Yan and Huang emperors (炎黃子孫),” people are consolidated into a common cultural-political identity often referred to as “the Chinese nation.” When the Confucian ideals of “the world belongs to all (*tianxia weigong* 天下為公)” and “universal harmony (*datong* 大同)” are located within the continual movement of Endless Growth, they become a historical ideal toward which society can gradually move and, in part, realize.

Individual immortality, then, is secured through lasting public deeds and collective memory. As Hannah Arendt writes: “By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave nonperishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a ‘divine’ nature.” (Arendt 2018, p. 10). The Confucian “Three Immortalities” (*sanbuxiu* 三不朽) and the filial-sacrificial practice expressed by “attending carefully to the end and remembering the departed with reverence” function as paradigms of immortality grounded in intergenerational public memory. By embedding the individual in the genealogical chain “ancestor—self—posterity” and fixing that relation in historical texts and narratives, the finite self can transcend biological death and attain continuing historical significance within the ongoing cultural transmission of Endless Growth.

This secularized form of transcendence implies that, “in its historical development, Chinese culture developed an immanent system of ultimate concern: rather than locating final meaning in a beyond, it locates ultimate significance in this historical world.” (Chen 2020). In other words, Chinese-style “immortality” is not a metaphysical promise of life elsewhere but a historical transcendence rooted in this-worldly existence and collective memory. It historicizes individual life so that those “no longer present” may, through cultural memory, acquire ethical value and existential meaning beyond biological finitude. As Fang Dongmei puts it, “I treat this ‘immortality’ as realizable in the present, because the creative advance of life does not accomplish eternity in some other nebulous realm but is completed and realized in the changes and developments of this world; not on the other shore, but here—upward to its origin and downward to its end.” (Fang 2012, pp. 124–25). Seen in this light, revering Heaven and following ancestors—by shaping history, culture, and value—offers a secular response to the “no-more,” rendering history less an indifferent fact than a tender, transcendentalized matrix of meaning.

4. Being Serious in Order to Straighten One’s Inner Life: Inward Realm-Oriented Transcendence

In its bifurcated development, the concept of *jing* yields two complementary forms of transcendence. One is the historical response—expressed as “revering Heaven and following ancestors” (敬天法祖)—which primarily addresses the existential anxiety of the “no-more.” The other is an inward response—expressed as “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life” (*jing yi zhi nei* 敬以直內)—that opens a transcendence of ideal realm (*jingjie* 境界). Through self-cultivation, understood as disciplined self-cultivation and inward practice, the subject can transcend the limits of sense perception, desire, and ordinary consciousness, thereby moving from mere experience into a deeper interior, spiritual, or mental domain.

Although these two dimensions did not emerge simultaneously, they are by no means independent functional modules. As previously noted, the primary function of “revering Heaven and following ancestors” (敬天法祖) is to embed biological existence within a symbolic order that precedes the individual—an order sustained through ancestral worship, ritual norms, and cultural memory. In traditional Chinese society, this complex system is encapsulated by the concept of ritual (*li* 禮), whose core meaning may be summarized

as “revering what is honored” (敬其所尊). As the moral subject habitually locates the self through these ritual norms and their accompanying affects, thereby acknowledging an order superior to the empirical self, the external normativity of ritual necessitates the crystallization of a stable, self-conscious psychological state. This constitutes the original significance of “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life” (敬以直內). Even though subsequent developments allowed this reflective state to be cultivated independently of specific situational contexts, the intrinsic link between the two remains undeniable.

For this reason, although the phrase *jing yi zhi nei* did not become a pure mode of self-cultivation detached from specific situations until Song–Ming Neo-Confucianism, it was already articulated in the *Wenyan* commentary on the Kun hexagram (坤卦) of *The I Ching* (易經). The commentary states: “Straightness means righting things; squareness means fulfillment of duty. The superior man is serious, in order to make his inner life straight; he does his duty, in order to make his outer life square. Where seriousness and fulfillment of duty stand firm, character will not become one-sided.” (直，其正也；方，其義也。君子敬以直內，義以方外，敬義立而德不孤) (Wilhelm and Baynes 1967, p. 393). Kong Yingda (孔穎達) explicates this passage, noting that “it says the gentleman uses reverence to make the inner straight; ‘inner’ here denotes the heart, and by employing this reverent demeanour one straightens the inner principle.” (言君子用敬以直內，內謂心也，用此恭敬以直內理) (Ruan 2009, p. 33).

Cheng Yi (程頤), however, revises “uses reverence” (*yongjing* 用敬) to “lay emphasis on reverence” (*zhujing* 主敬) and glosses the passage: “The superior person emphasizes reverent composure so as to be direct internally, and holds on to rightness so as to be square externally. When reverent composure is established and one is internally direct, rightness takes form and one is externally square.” (君子主敬以直其內，守義以方其外。敬立而內直，義形而外方) (Cheng and Cheng 2004, p. 712). Obviously, Kong’s gloss treats *jing* largely as an outward, deferential behavior that disciplines the mind from the outside. Cheng Yi, by contrast, transforms *jing* into an inner method of self-cultivation: an embodied practice and inner lawgiving that produces a stable attitudinal state. Through this reconfiguration, Chan Wing-tsit noted that the character *jing*, which for a millennium had shown “no conceptual advance” is, in the hands of the Two Chengs (二程), opened up to a new conceptual horizon and given a fresh definition (W.-t. Chan 1996, p. 73).

Building on Cheng’s glosses, Zhu Xi (朱熹) offers a more precise account of *jing yi zhi nei*. Zhu reads the terms as follows: “‘Being correct’ means the original substance (*benti* 本體). ‘Being right’ means judgment. ‘Reverent composure’ means holding on to one’s original substance.” (正，謂本體。義，謂裁制。敬，則本體之守也) (Zhu 2020, p. 73). In Zhu’s idiom, the “original substance” unmistakably names the principle of Heaven (天理). Prior to Song–Ming Neo-Confucianism, the Principle of Heaven (天理) had not yet emerged as an independent ontological concept; its meaning was largely subsumed under notions such as the “Way of Heaven” (*tiandao* 天道) and the “Mandate of Heaven” (*tianming* 天命), where it primarily denoted a normative cosmic order. With the advent of Song dynasty Neo-Confucianism—especially in the thought of the Cheng brothers—the Principle of Heaven (天理) was elevated to supreme ontological status and internalized through the proposition that “human nature is identical with principle” (*xingjili* 性即理). It is in this sense that Cheng Hao could say, “Though my studies have a source in tradition, the words ‘Principle of Heaven’ were something I arrived at through embodied realization from within myself.” (Cheng and Cheng 2004, p. 424). This mode of realization entails a process of self-cultivation through which the human mind is restored to its original state, allowing the principle that is inherently present to manifest with clarity. Accordingly, *jing*—described as “the first meaning at the gate of the sages” (*shengmen diyiyi* 聖門第一義)—is relocated at the point where heart and principle meet. As Tang Junyi puts

it, the aim is “to prevent heart and principle from falling into disunity so that heart and principle may be brought into oneness.” (Tang 2016b, p. 158).

In the later development of the School of Mind (心學), Wang Yangming (王陽明) likewise treats *jing* as the heart’s self-awareness. Though his wording departs from Zhu Xi’s, his central concern remains the same: the unity of mind and principle. Wang draws a careful distinction between reverential awe and ordinary fear:

The “reverential awe” that the superior person speaks of is not ordinary fear or anxious dread; rather, it is to be circumspect even when nothing is seen and fearful even when nothing is heard. ... The fundamental substance of the mind is the Principle of Heaven. The clear, responsive luminosity of the Principle is what is called innate knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知). The superior person’s guarded circumspection and apprehension arise from a single fear: that this clear, responsive awareness might become dim or lax, drift into eccentric, perverse, or fanciful paths, and thus lose the rightness of its essential nature.

夫君子之所謂敬畏者，非有所恐懼憂患之謂也，乃戒慎不睹，恐懼不聞之謂耳。……夫心之本體，即天理也。天理之昭明靈覺，所謂良知也。君子之戒慎恐懼，惟恐其昭明靈覺者或有所昏昧放逸，流於非僻邪妄而失其本體之正耳。

(Wang 2015, p. 230)

On the School of Mind reading, then, genuine reverential awe is not—pace *The Great Learning* (大學)—a fear directed at empirical objects. Rather, as *The Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸) describes, it is to be cautious when nothing is seen and fearful when nothing is heard. This does not imply a concern over moral ambiguity—namely, uncertainty regarding right and wrong—but rather a vigilance directed at the precariousness of innate knowledge itself; it emphasizes an inward vigilance: a regimen of self-checking and arousal that keeps the mind alert so that its substance does not drift into obscurity or laxity. For Wang, this inward vigilance secures the mind’s apprehension of the Principle. Hence, he interpreted the “single-mindedness” of reverence as “Concentrating on one thing means the absolute concentration of the mind on the Principle of Nature.” (主一是專主一個天理) (Wang 1963, p. 25).

Thus, the unity of mind and principle becomes the central aim of seriousness-centered practice. On the path to transcending the finitude of experience, this practice chiefly opens the possibility of transforming what is “not-yet” by dissolving human selfish desires and actualizing the Principle of Heaven. As Zhu Xi puts it, “where the Principle of Heaven exists, preserve the Principle; where human desire exists, remove human desire.” (在天理則存天理，在人欲則去人欲) (Li 1986, p. 2015). The opposition is closely tied to the traditional maxim: “The mind of man is restless,—prone to err; its affinity for the right way is small. Be discriminating, be undivided, that you may sincerely hold fast the Mean.” (人心惟危，道心惟微，惟精惟一，允執厥中) (Legge 1865a, pp. 61–62). Here, it is crucial to specify that “human desires” primarily refer to “selfish desires.” As Feng Youlan clarifies, “Human nature is the principle of Heaven; that is what is called ‘the mind of the Way.’ Because human beings possess a bodily form endowed with vital endowment, emotions arise therefrom; when these emotions, in their flow, lapse into excess, they all become human desires—this is what is called ‘the mind of man.’ Human desires are also referred to as selfish desires ... insofar as they are understood as the excessive outflow of emotions arising from the fact that human beings exist as individuals, they are called selfish desires.” (Feng 2001c, p. 341). Consequently, “the mind of man” (*renxin* 人心) refers to sensuous desires: innate, difficult to eradicate, and liable, if unchecked, to engulf the self and confine it within a narrowly finite existence. To avert this, the self must be governed by “the mind of the Way” (*daoxin* 道心)—the moral reason it represents—so as to subdue selfish desire,

uphold the subject, and preserve openness to the infinite. In this way, the transcendent realm of unity between mind and principle is realized.

With the establishment of the practice of seriousness, the finite self, by realizing the unity of mind and principle, comes to experientially affirm the transcendence of the Principle of Heaven. In this way, ordinary experiential existence acquires a transcendent significance. Within the Neo-Confucian framework, the Principle of Heaven is understood as a practical norm that precedes experience and provides the basis for value judgment within experience. In its role and status, it bears a certain resemblance to the “God” that Kant was compelled to posit in practical reason for the sake of realizing the highest good. Yet unlike Kant—who treats God as a postulate standing above and beyond human existence—the Principle of Heaven is not something externally posited or metaphysically remote. Rather, it is conceived as an immanent reality within the moral subject itself. This difference is decisive. For Kant, transcendence remains an open, infinite telos oriented toward God—a perpetual striving. For Neo-Confucianism, however, the transcendent ground is already inherent within human nature; the practice of seriousness, understood as unifying oneself with principle, therefore issues in a transformation of the mode of existence: a shift from a natural, self-centered life to a principle-directed, transcendent mode of being (Shen 2022).

In this process, transcendence does not rely on divine revelation or personal salvation but is achieved through the practice of self-cultivation, enabling individuals to attain enlightenment (*juejie* 覺解)⁶ and progressively realize spiritual states. Thus, in contrast to the “self-surrender type” of conversion found in Western religions, Neo-Confucianism emphasizes a “volitional type” of enlightenment. In conversion-based religions, transcendent experiences are attained through reverence for, faith in, and surrender to God, producing a sense of dependence and belonging. In Confucianism, and especially within Neo-Confucian thought, the transcendent experience realized through awareness takes on a distinctive form: it appears as the “joy of Confucius and Yan Hui” (*kong yan zhi le* 孔顏之樂), a mode of spiritual delight grounded in an attunement to the meaning of life and the realization of inner freedom.

According to Neo-Confucian understanding, at this level of realization—when one’s conduct is aligned with the Way—affectivity and emotional responsiveness are no longer centered on the private, egoic self, but unfold as an unrestricted freedom. Cheng Hao (程顥) describes this state as “the mind pervading all things without being a self; the affections following all things without being affections—spacious, impartial, responding to things as they come” (心普萬物而無心，情順萬物而無情，廓然而大公，物來而順應) (Cheng and Cheng 2004, p. 460). Such a state does not involve suppressing or extinguishing emotion; rather, it transfigures emotion without abandoning it and preserves responsive affectivity toward the myriad while dissolving ego-centered craving. Feng Youlan characterizes the result as “being sentient yet selfless” (*youqing wuwo* 有情無我) (Feng 2001a, p. 431).

In short, within Neo-Confucian accounts of transcendence, *jing* functions to preserve the fundamental principle and thereby secure the unity of mind and principle. Through the disciplined practice of “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life”, the ordinary self can experientially realize the principle of Heaven and undergo a transformation of being. Neo-Confucian transcendence is thus inward and insight-driven: it constitutes a horizon of moral and existential transfiguration grounded in sustained self-cultivation rather than in any external or salvific intervention.

5. Concluding Reflections: A Comparative Genealogy of Confucian Transcendence

Viewed against human finitude, transcendence takes two related forms: a response to the “no-more” of death and a projection toward the “not-yet” of unrealized possibility. The

first—religious consolation in the face of death—seeks to repair the rupture of embodied life; the second—philosophical striving toward fulfillment—aims to open experience to future possibilities. Across Chinese and Western thought, these orientations produce two distinct yet interconnected genealogies of transcendence, each showing how finite agents imagine and enact surpassing.

When confronted with the “no-more,” Western traditions tend to construct an other-worldly, ontological transcendence: recourse to God, conversion, eschatological hope, and belief in the soul’s immortality “in that world” are offered as remedies for the rupture of present life. By contrast, Chinese culture develops a historical, this-worldly transcendence: ancestor veneration, sacrificial ritual, and public memory translate absence into enduring historical presence, sacralize intergenerational continuity, and embed the sacred within ongoing social life. Tian Wei succinctly captures this contrast: “Confucianism does not elevate death to an existential ‘problem’ to be interrogated with the same intensity reserved for life; rather, it attenuates, conceals, and suspends a self-conscious problematization of death, directing attention and effort toward living fully in the present.” For Christianity, by contrast, “it does not approach ultimate concern from a posture of elite cultural achievement or the aim of performing world-historical moral deeds so that ‘my influence’ endures here; it approaches ultimate concern with humble submission, awaiting God’s aid to rescue the self from a world enmeshed in sin and death, to enter ‘that world,’ and to secure the personal, everlasting life of ‘me, this person.’” (Tian 2015).

Similarly, in response to the “not-yet” of experience, philosophy and Neo-Confucianism offer divergent constructions. Kant argues that free will cannot be demonstrated by theoretical reason within experience but can be postulated as a practical necessity with objective validity; thus, free will is located in the practical order while pointing beyond empirical limits (Deng 2006, p. 124). Accordingly, for Kant the harmony between virtue and happiness cannot be fully realized within the empirical world of this life, and it is precisely this limitation that leads him to reserve a necessary place for faith.

By contrast, Song–Ming Neo-Confucianism regards the principle of Heaven as an immanent and existential reality, realized through an integrity-centered discipline of reverence. The practice seeks to unify mind and principle; its transcendence is not a distant postulate but an attainable mode of being embedded in ordinary life. Through sustained self-cultivation, individuals preserve the genuine possibility of fulfillment within this world.

Taken together, historical transcendence and realm-oriented transcendence attainment jointly determine that Confucianism locates the sacred and the complete within a horizon of continuous existence and aesthetic experience. Although these two forms of transcendence differ in orientation, they are not, as emphasized at the outset, separated from one another. Rather, within a this-worldly and secular framework, they constitute a mutually presupposing and internally coherent structure. Within this structure, revering Heaven and following ancestors do not merely respond to the finitude of biological life; they also underpin political order and consolidate shared values, shaping history through cultural memory. Meanwhile, the existential attainment realized through “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life” (敬以直内) likewise responds to the finiteness of life—not by perpetuating the form of the self to resist death, but by dissolving death anxiety through an affirmation of the intrinsic meaning of one’s existence. From this perspective, although the end of individual life is unavoidable, and even the traces of existence produced through ethical action may eventually fade, the inquiry into ultimate meaning is not thereby severed. It arises not from the temporal prolongation of life, but from a mode of self-cultivation through which authenticity is continually apprehended and made present within life itself.

Yet, this form of transcendence as existential attainment—centered on the ideal of the unity of mind and principle—inevitably requires the individual to engage in self-restraint and return to ritual (*keji fuli* 克己復禮). Consequently, viewed from the perspective of modern individualism, it frequently faces the criticism that it dissolves the individual. In reality, this concern reflects an anxiety specific to the framework of “atomistic individualism.” From that standpoint, the “self” is conceived as an independent, closed entity; once stripped of external relations, such a self-enclosed being can hope for immortality only through the divine, and in the absence of God, faces absolute nothingness. Confucianism, by contrast, fundamentally understands the individual within an ethical horizon. What it terms “self-restraint and return to ritual” (the overcoming of selfish desires) aims not at negating the self, but at dissolving self-centeredness and re-embedding the individual within an expansive web of vital relations. In this sense, Qian Xinzu has characterized the Confucian conception of the person as a form of “relational individualism” or “integrative individualism” (Qian 2016, pp. 38–39).

Admittedly, the question of how the “individual” ought to be constituted in modern society is complex and bound up with broader patterns of social development. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the Confucian understanding of the individual—as embedded in relationships, formed through ethical practice, and affirmed as a self through realm-oriented transcendence—offers a meaningful response to the nihilism generated by atomized individuality.

It is precisely within this context that Confucianism’s bidirectional transcendence acquires its contemporary significance, linking individual to community and present to future. More concretely, Confucianism first addresses death anxiety through the historical transcendence of revering Heaven and following ancestors. This tangible, affectively accessible form of intergenerational continuity provides individual ethical conduct with an anticipated and intelligible form of “efficacious return,” thereby endowing moral action with sustained, this-worldly motivation. Even in modern societies where ethical bonds have become increasingly attenuated, individuals may still, through the practice of straightening the interior with reverence, apprehend the meaning of existence in a mode of realm-oriented transcendence. Through this bidirectional structure, Confucian ethics serves not merely as a normative framework for life, but as a vital resource in a secularized world—capable of responding to the twofold problem of human finitude and bringing a measure of warmth and meaning to an otherwise lonely and nihilistic modern condition.

In short, Western conceptions of ontological transcendence converge on God: only God is conceived as able to guarantee the soul’s immortality and to provide practical reason with an infinite orienting end. By contrast, Confucianism fuses historical transcendence and realm-oriented transcendence within an imminent, this-worldly framework. Within this framework, the individual acquires existential significance through public memory and undergoes spiritual transformation through the disciplined practice of reverence. Confucian thought thus pursues the infinite immanently, rooting the search for ultimate meaning in lived experience and allowing everyday ethical particularity to rise toward the Way of Heaven (*tiandao* 天道) while preserving and honoring human relationships in the present world.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Y.S. and Z.Z.; methodology, Y.S.; formal analysis, Y.S.; investigation, Y.S.; resources, Z.Z.; data curation, Y.S.; writing—original draft preparation, Y.S.; writing—review and editing, Y.S. and Z.Z.; supervision, Z.Z.; project administration, Z.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Tillich treats transcendence in the context of existential orientation; he explains “*telos*” as follows: “The word *telos* expresses the relation of life and spirit more precisely than the words ‘aim’ or ‘goal.’ It expresses the inner directedness of life toward spirit, the urge of life to become spirit, to fulfil itself as spirit. *Telos* stands for an inner, essential, necessary aim, for that in which a being fulfils its own nature.” (Tillich 1967, p. 249).
- ² It should be noted here that although Kant posits “free will” as a major postulate, it nevertheless possesses objective reality. As Deng Xiaomang observes, “The moral law enables one to recognize that human beings are in fact free in practice, and conversely establishes human freedom as the ‘justification for existence’ of the moral law. Thus, due to the existence of the moral law, freedom ceases to be merely the possible ‘transcendental freedom’ conceived in the Critique of Pure Reason, and instead becomes ‘practical freedom’—that is, ‘free will’—endowed with objective reality.” (Deng 2006, p. 124).
- ³ The Confucian concept of *jing* is psychologically complex. Sin Yee Chan identifies two dimensions: an “intentional state of respect” and a “serious frame of mind” (S. Y. Chan 2006). Building on this, Lu Yinghua further classifies *jing* into “intentional feelings directed at an object” and a “frame of mind without a presupposed object” (Lu 2021, pp. 132–50). The latter corresponds to “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life” (敬以直内), while the former targets either specific persons or the transcendent Heaven. In comparison with Kantian categories, only *reverentia* parallels the Confucian reverence for Heaven/ancestors in a religious, transcendent sense. The other two differ significantly: the “frame of mind without a presupposed object” is fundamentally a practice of self-cultivation (工夫), distinct from Kant’s *Respekt* for the moral law. Regarding the intentional feeling toward persons, we concur with Wawrytko (1982) that the Confucian concept (specifically *gongjing* (恭敬)) is predicated on a ritualized hierarchy, distinguishing it from Kantian *observantia*. As this article focuses on the transcendent dimension of *jing*, the social aspect of *gongjing* falls outside its scope.
- ⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Chinese classical sources in this article are by the author.
- ⁵ While Brown and McLeod (2021) and Song (2026) move beyond dualistic models by framing Confucian transcendence through “non-naturalistic” logic and internal generative structures (*shengsheng* 生生), their insights remain primarily cosmological. This discussion supplements their work by addressing “realm-oriented transcendence,” a path of self-cultivation rooted in the pre-Qin tradition of “being serious in order to straighten one’s inner life” (*jing yi zhi nei* 敬以直内) and the “joy of Confucius and Yan Hui” (*Kong Yan zhi le* 孔顏之樂). By integrating these existential dimensions, this study seeks to further develop the theory of Confucian “bidirectional transcendence.”
- ⁶ William James distinguished between two types of religious conversion: the volitional type and the type by self-surrender, the former being “conscious and voluntary,” the latter “unconscious and involuntary.” (James 2012, p. 162). Although both are termed “conversion” within the Western religious context, in Chinese philosophical discourse they may roughly correspond to *juejie* (覺解) and *guiyi* (皈依). Feng Youlan interpreted *juejie* as “the dissolution of ignorance,” and, according to the degree of such awakening, proposed four spiritual levels—natural, utilitarian, moral, and cosmic (Feng 2001b, pp. 496–509). Mou Zongsan, in contrast, explained *guiyi* as “the dissolution of one’s subjectivity; in other words, the complete negation of one’s own existence—a self-negation—followed by entrusting the negated self to a transcendent being, namely God.” (Mou 2010, p. 17). Setting aside value judgments, the distinction between *juejie* and *guiyi* offers an illuminating framework for characterizing the respective religious orientations of Chinese and Western traditions.

References

- Arendt, Hannah. 2018. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Brown, Joshua R., and Alexis McLeod. 2021. *Transcendence and Non-Naturalism in Early Chinese Thought*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Chan, Sin Yee. 2006. The Confucian Notion of Jing (Respect). *Philosophy East and West* 2: 229–52. [CrossRef]
- Chan, Wing-tsit 陳榮捷. 1996. *Songming lixue zhi gainian yu lishi* 宋明理學之概念與歷史 [Concepts and History of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism]. Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Zhongguo Wenzhe Yanjiusuo.
- Chang, Huiying 常會營. 2023. Shuangxiang chaoyue: Lun Kongzi sixiang de chaoyexing 雙向超越：論孔子思想的超越性 [Double Transcendence: On the Transcendence of Confucius’s Thought]. *Guoji Ruxue* 國際儒學 [International Studies on Confucianism] 1: 90–98.

- Chen, Tingxiang 陳廷湘. 2020. Zhongguo wenhua cian xinyang jingshen de xingcheng fazhan ji yiyi 中國文化此岸信仰精神的形成發展及意義 [Formation, Development and Significance of “This Shore” Belief in Chinese Culture]. *Zhonghua Wenhua Luntan* 中華文化論壇 [Journal of Chinese Culture] 1: 135–41.
- Cheng, Hao 程顥, and Yi Cheng 程頤. 2004. *Ercheng ji* 二程集 [Collected Works of the Two Chengs]. Edited by Xiaoyu Wang 王孝魚. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Cheng, Zhihua 程志華. 2023. Chaoyue de lianglei sanceng—Jiyu shikong guannian de sikao 超越的兩類三層——基於時空觀念的思考 [Two Categories and Three Layers of Transcendence]. *Guoxue Xuekan* 國學學刊 [Research in the Traditions of Chinese Culture] 4: 1–6.
- Deng, Xiaomang 鄧曉芒. 2005. Kangde de “xianyan” yu “chaoyan” zhi bian 康德的“先驗”與“超驗”之辨 [Discrimination on Transcendental and Transcendent in Kant’s philosophy]. *Tongji Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexueban)* 同濟大學學報（社會科學版） [Journal of Tongji University (Social Science Edition)] 5: 1–12.
- Deng, Xiaomang 鄧曉芒. 2006. *Kangde zhexue zhu wenti* 康德哲學諸問題 [Problems in Kant’s Philosophy]. Beijing: Shenghuo·Dushu·Xinzhishi Sanlian Shudian.
- Fang, Dongmei 方東美. 2012. *Zhongguo rensheng zhexue* 中國人生哲學 [Chinese Philosophy of Life]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Feng, Youlan 馮友蘭. 2001a. Nanduji 南渡集 [The Southern Crossing Collection]. In *Sansongtang quanji* 三松堂全集 [The Collected Works of Sansongtang]. Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Chubanshe, vol. 5.
- Feng, Youlan 馮友蘭. 2001b. Xinyuanren 新原人 [The New Original Man]. In *Sansongtang quanji* 三松堂全集 [The Collected Works of Sansongtang]. Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Chubanshe, vol. 4.
- Feng, Youlan 馮友蘭. 2001c. *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史 [A History of Chinese Philosophy]. In *Sansongtang quanji* 三松堂全集 [The Collected Works of Sansongtang]. Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Chubanshe, vol. 3.
- Hu, Houxuan 胡厚宣, ed. 1999. *Jiaguwen heji shiwen* 甲骨文合集釋文 [Explanatory Texts of the Collected Oracle Bone Inscriptions]. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe.
- Huang, Yushun 黃玉順. 2021. “Chaoyan” haishi “chaofan”—Rujia chaoyue guannian shengsi “超驗”還是“超凡”——儒家超越觀念省思 [“Transcendental” or “Transcendent”—Reflection on the Confucian Concept of Transcendence]. *Tansuo yu Zhengming* 探索與爭鳴 [Exploration and Free Views] 5: 73–81.
- James, William. 2012. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Legge, James. 1865a. *The Shoo King, The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena and Copious Indexes, in 7 Volumes: 3, Part 1*. Hong Kong: At The Author’s.
- Legge, James. 1865b. *The Shoo King, The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena and Copious Indexes, in 7 Volumes: 3, Part 2*. Hong Kong: At The Author’s.
- Legge, James. 1885. *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, vol. 3.
- Legge, James. 1960a. *Confucian Analects, The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena and Copious Indexes, in 5 Volumes: 1*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Legge, James. 1960b. *The She King, The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena and Copious Indexes, in 5 Volumes: 4*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Li, Jingde 黎靖德, ed. 1986. *Zhuji yulei* 朱子語類 [Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Liang, Tao 梁濤. 2022. Lun ruxue de shuangxiang chaoyue shuo 論儒學的雙向超越說 [On the Bidirectional Transcendence of Confucianism]. In *Jiu tianren zhi ji: Rujia chaoyexing wenti tanyan* 究天人之際：儒家超越性問題探研 [Investigating the Boundary Between Heaven and Humanity: A Study of Transcendence in Confucian Thought]. Edited by Fasheng Zhao 趙法生. Shijiazhuang: Hebei Renmin Chubanshe.
- Liu, Baonan 劉寶楠. 1990. *Lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義 [Rectified Interpretations of the Analects]. Edited by Liushui Gao 高流水. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Lu, Yinghua. 2021. *Daode qinggan xianxiangxue: Tougou rujia de chanming* 道德情感現象學：透過儒家哲學的闡明 [The Phenomenology of Moral Sentiments: An Elucidation through Confucian Philosophy]. Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe.
- Mincheva, Desislava Dencheva. 2024. The Mysteries of Orphism: The Path to Enlightenment and Overcoming Evil. In *Unitech-Selected Papers*. Gabrovo: Technical University of Gabrovo, vol. 2024. [CrossRef]
- Mou, Zongsan 牟宗三. 2010. *Zhongguo zhexue de tezhi* 中國哲學的特質 [The Character of Chinese Philosophy]. Changchun: Jilin Chubanshe.
- Qian, Xinzun 錢新祖. 2016. *Zhongguo sixiangshi jiangyi* 中國思想史講義 [Lectures on the History of Chinese Thought]. Shanghai: Dongfang Chubanshe.
- Ruan, Yuan 阮元, ed. 2009. *Shisan jing zhushu (Qing Jiaqing kanben)* 十三經注疏（清嘉慶刊本） [Commentaries and Annotations on the Thirteen Classics (Qing Jiaqing Edition)]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Schwartz, Benjamin I. 1975. Transcendence in Ancient China. *Daedalus* 104: 57–68.
- Shah, Zulfikar Ali. 2012. *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Judaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions*. Malta: Gutenberg Press Ltd.

- Shen, Shunfu 沈順福. 2022. Lun lixue gongfu de benzhi 論理學工夫的本質 [On the Essence of Neo-Confucian Concept of Gongfu]. *Fudan Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban) 復旦學報 (社會科學版)* [Fudan Journal (Social Sciences)] 1: 27–34.
- Song, Bin 宋斌. 2026. *Debating Transcendence: Creatio ex nihilo and Sheng Sheng*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Su, Yu 蘇輿. 1992. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng 春秋繁露義證* [Critical Commentary and Evidence for the Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals]. Edited by Zhong Zhe 鍾哲. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Sun, Xiangchen 孫向晨. 2016. Shengsheng buxi—Yizhong shengcunlun de fenxi 生生不息——一種生存論的分析 [Endless Life—An Ontological Analysis]. *Zhongguo Zhexue yu Wenhua 中國哲學與文化* [The Journal of Chinese Philosophy And Culture] 13: 1–21.
- Tang, Junyi 唐君毅. 2016a. Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi 中國文化之精神價值 [The Spiritual Value of Chinese Culture]. In *Tang Junyi quanji 唐君毅全集* [The Complete Works of Tang Junyi]. Beijing: Jiuzhou Chubanshe, vol. 9.
- Tang, Junyi 唐君毅. 2016b. Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun: Yuanjiao pian 中國哲學原論·原教篇 [Principles of Chinese Philosophy: Section on Primary Teachings]. In *Tang Junyi quanji 唐君毅全集* [The Complete Works of Tang Junyi]. Beijing: Jiuzhou Chubanshe, vol. 22.
- Tian, Wei 田薇. 2015. Rujia de buxiu guan ji qi xiandu—Yi jidu jiao de yongsheng guan wei canzao 儒家的不朽觀及其限度——以基督教的永生觀為參照 [Confucian Views of Immortality and Their Limits: With Reference to the Christian View of Eternal Life]. *Shijie Zongjiao Wenhua 世界宗教文化* [The World Religious Cultures] 3: 33–40.
- Tillich, Paul. 1967. *Systematic Theology: Three Volumes in One*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wainwright, William J. 2017. Ontological and Experiential Transcendence and the Love of God. *Sintese, Belo Horizonte* 44: 425–44. [CrossRef]
- Wang, Yangming 王陽明. 1963. *Instructions for Practical Living, and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*. Translated by Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wang, Yangming 王陽明 [Wang, Shouren 王守仁]. 2015. *Wang Wencheng Gong quanshu 王文成公全書* [The Complete Works of Wang Yangming]. Edited by Xiaoxin Wang 王曉昕 and Pinglüe Zhao 趙平略. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Wawrytko, Sandra A. 1982. Confucius and Kant: The ethics of respect. *Philosophy East and West* 3: 237–57. [CrossRef]
- Westphal, Merold. 2017. Immanence and Transcendence. In *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*. Edited by Joel D. S. Rasmussen, Judith Wolfe and Johannes Zachhuber. Online Publication. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [CrossRef]
- Wilhelm, Hellmut, and Cary F. Baynes. 1967. *The I Ching or Book of Changes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Xu, Fuguan 徐復觀. 2013. *Zhongguo renxing lunshi: Xianqin pian 中國人性論史·先秦篇* [A History of Chinese Theories of Human Nature: The Pre-Qin Volume]. Beijing: Jiuzhou Chubanshe.
- Yu, Xingwu 于省吾. 1963. Shi Qiang, Gou, Jing, Mei 釋羌、苟、敬、美 [On Qiang, Gou, Jing, and Mei]. *Jilin Daxue Shehui Kexue Xuebao 吉林大學社會科學學報* [Jilin University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences] 1: 43–50.
- Yu, Ying-shih 余英時. 2014. *Lun tianren zhi ji: Zhongguo gudai sixiang qiyuan shitan 論天人之際：中國古代思想起源試探* [On the Boundary Between Heaven and Humanity: Explorations into the Origins of Ancient Chinese Thought]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Zhao, Fasheng 趙法生. 2020. Lun Kongzi de zhongdao chaoyue 論孔子的中道超越 [On Confucius's Transcendence as the Transcendence of the Golden Mean]. *Zhexue Yanjiu 哲學研究* [Philosophical Research] 4: 62–71.
- Zhu, Xi 朱熹. 2020. *The Original Meaning of the Yijing: Commentary on the Scripture of Change*. Translated by Joseph A. Adler. New York: Columbia University Press.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.